

**IN HONOR OF ORAH BELLE SHERMAN**  
**Statement for the Congressional Record**  
**February 26, 2004**  
*Congressman John Lewis*

Mr. Speaker, in the last days of Black History Month, I want to be sure this Congress honors the memory of Orah Belle Sherman, a woman who served our democracy well. In the eyes of some, her labor may have seemed humble, but her spirit was great. For 41 years, Orah Belle Sherman served the citizens of Atlanta as the hostess of Paschal's restaurant, and the comfort and hospitality of Paschal's reached the very soul of the Civil Rights Movement.

The role of the capable hostess is fully acknowledged in politics today. Sometimes decisions that impact the history of mankind may be made in the relaxation of social environments. A hostess is the architect of that relaxation, creating a seamless atmosphere of comfort where minds can meet undistracted and strike an agreement. Her grace eases the tension of division, and the ambience she offers invites opposing sides to sit down together. Orah Belle Sherman was a master hostess among hostesses because her grace not only cooled the tensions of ideological differences, but momentarily silenced the ravages of racism.

In a segregated Atlanta, where a cacophony of signs declared "White Only," "Colored Only," "Colored Waiting," "White Waiting," in the heart of a hostile America, in the recesses of the Jim Crow South where a wilderness of racism threatened the future of this nation, Paschal's became an oasis of friendship, brotherhood and peace. There African Americans were always welcomed by Orah Belle Sherman.

She created a safe space where men and women who were outcasts of mainstream America could socialize in dignity and peace. In her haven of comfort and acceptance, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ambassador Andrew Young, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Dr. Benjamin Mays and many other soon-to-be great men of the Civil Rights Movement were welcomed, fed, and given the room to deliberate. In the loving glow of Orah Belle Sherman, they strategized the actions that would become the Movement we know today. Many of the great civil rights speeches, the plans for marches and sit-ins, the boycotts and sermons were discussed in the ambience of Paschal's restaurant.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that, "Love is the most durable power in the world. This creative force is the most potent instrument available in mankind's quest for security and peace." The love of Orah Belle Sherman has an enduring place in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. She is a gem of the South that reminds us of a culture of hospitality that is slipping away. Her graciousness and charm consoled the builders of a new day for America. She will long be remembered in the hearts of all the lives she touched.

John Lewis  
Member of Congress